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Subject: FW: Slate Article: So Happy Together

I promise I won't keep bombarding you, but this was one more good piece.

From: Anne-Marie Slaughter [mailto:slaughtr@Princeton.EDU]
Sent: Wednesday, July 22, 2009 10:32 PM
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From: slaughtr@Princeton.EDU [mailto:slaughtr@Princeton.EDU]
Sent: Wednesday, July 22, 2009 7:11 AM
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Subject: Slate Article: So Happy Together

Anne-Marie Slaughter has sent you an article from  Slate Magazine



war stories

So Happy Together
Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama have been a harmonious team. So far.
By Fred Kaplan
Posted Friday, July 17, 2009, at 6:35 PM ET

Now that Hillary Clinton has delivered her maiden major address, what can we say about the Obama administration's foreign policy and his secretary of state's role in shaping it? Did she say anything distinctive from what President Barack Obama has been saying? Is it true, as many have written, that she's been on the outs with the White House, and did this speech put her back in or carve an enclave for her own influence and ambitions?

This last question, and gossip about internecine power struggles, is hugely overhyped. By all accounts, relations between the White House and Foggy Bottom (you can throw in the Pentagon, too) are more harmonious than at any time anyone can remember. Clearly this is a top-down administration: the president controls policy and imposes discipline. But on foreign policy, there's no chafing, no disputes, on basic principles.

That's an accomplishment in itself. I can't think of any administration since World War II that could make the same claim so early in its tenure. However, the key term here is "basic principles," and some of them are so basic that they could mask major differences that spring up in the future if mishaps spark reassessments and choices must be made about specific directions in policy.

Secretary Clinton's speech, which was delivered to the Council on Foreign Relations on July 15, offers no hints as to which way she or Obama might lean in the event that their approach fails to yield the desired results, and a crisis—in Iran, North Korea, Afghanistan/Pakistan, or wherever—barrels on unimpeded.

The speech holds some genuine insights into the nature of the modern world and some intriguing ideas about how to deal with it. Rejecting both Bush's unilateralism and a Kissingerian "concert of great powers," she advances the idea of solving common problems (nuclear proliferation, terrorism, climate change, hunger, etc.) by forming "partnerships"—offering "a place at the table for any nation, group, or citizen willing to shoulder a fair share of the burden"—and converting them into

"power coalitions" to constrain or deter obstructionists and enemies. She talks about providing "incentives" to those who share our interests but not enough to act on them; elevating development as a "core pillar of American power"; integrating civil and military action in areas of conflict; and, especially, cooperating with powers on one area even if they don't share our interests on another area. (She condemns Bush's approach—*take it or leave it and you're either with us or against us*—as "global malpractice.") Finally, she acknowledges that this approach is "no panacea" and warns foes that it should not be seen as a sign of weakness or as an "alternative to our national-security arsenal."

She says this "smart power" approach stems not from excess idealism but from a pragmatic awareness of "the world as it is." There's the dispersion of global power, which makes it impossible for any one nation to meet the world's challenges alone. But also the fact that few of these challenges (she says, "no challenges," but this goes too far) can be met without U.S. leadership. All this is true; some of it truistic. But how does it translate into policy?

Take Afghanistan. The counterinsurgency strategists' mantra is that security requires development, and development requires security. Fine, but where does that leave us if the two can't be achieved simultaneously? Anyone who deals with East Asia knows that North Korea's drive for a nuclear arsenal can't be stopped unless the Chinese leaders play an active role in helping to stop it. Yet it's also evident that the Chinese have a half-dozen reasons not to help stop it (mainly because the sanctions required to do so might disrupt or topple the Pyongyang government, which could foment a drastic refugee crisis along the Chinese-North Korean border). One senior official says that the Obama administration is making "slow progress" in nudging China in the right direction. What happens if the progress is too slow? Similar questions can be posed about the other nuclear wannabe, Iran: Do we engage? What if that doesn't work? Should we then move to form an anti-Iran coalition in the region? What consequences will that have in the other countries' domestic politics?

Obama and Clinton at least realize that these new approaches might take time to bear fruit. Clinton quotes the sociologist Max Weber (has any secretary of state done that before?): "Politics is the long and slow boring of hard boards. It takes both passion and perspective," which is to say patience. However, she also quotes Tom Paine's "We have it within our power to start the world over again" and adds that "we are called upon to use that power" today. There's a certain contradiction here—between pragmatism and pie-in-the-sky idealism—and it's not yet clear how she or Obama will resolve this.

The fact is, Obama hasn't yet had to make a tough choice on any major issue of foreign policy. The troop withdrawal from Iraq, including its timetable, wasn't really his call; it was set down in the Status of Forces Agreement that Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki imposed on the United States in the final months of George W. Bush's presidency. Obama's decision to send an additional 17,000 troops to Afghanistan was a shrewd middle course between his various advisers; it fell short of defining a clear strategy. Now that the generals are urging him to send still more troops, he may have to take a firm stance very soon. Which way will he go? How do the principles laid down in Clinton's speech—or his own pronouncements—concretely help him?

The administration, after all, is still in its birthing stages; not even six months have passed since Barack Obama took the oath. Stumbles will almost certainly occur; feuds and fisticuffs may yet break out. The president and his top advisers have an intelligent approach to the world; that doesn't guarantee the rest of the world will cooperate.

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